



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Joel 1:1-20

"Joel - Judah, the Locust, and the Day of the Lord"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the opportunity to study the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the prophets of the Old Testament, and Lord, while we realize that the local conditions are often quite different from the situation in which we live, we recognize the great principles by which they sought to teach and instruct are the principles by which we today ought to live. And we pray that as we study in the prophecy of Joel the great truths that are found there may be truths that are seen to be relevant to the daily life that we have, and especially, relevant to the future that seems so shortly to come to pass.

We pray for each individual in this audience and ask Lord that the word of God may be a strengthening force as well as an illuminating thing in the life of each on of us. We commit this time to Thee and also the classes that follow in the next hour. In Jesus' name. Amen

[Message] Tonight we are turning for the first of our series of studies in the Old Testament Minor Prophets again to the Book of Joel; Hosea, Joel, Amos. Now as in the other studies that we have done in the Minor Prophets I will be using the New American Standard Bible as our text, and so if you have some other edition of the Old Testament then you will understand why there is a difference.

Joel chapter 1 and our subject for tonight is “Judah, the Locust, and the Day of the Lord.” Joel has been called the prophet of Pentecost. Now the reason for that is obvious if you have read the Book of Joel recently. It is because one of the great prophecies the Apostle Peter cites on the Day of Pentecost is found in the last part of chapter 2 in the Book of Joel. It’s the prophecy about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and you remember, I know, that Peter said on the Day of Pentecost that the things that were happening when the Holy Spirit was poured out were the fulfillment of this great prophecy from Joel chapter 2.

Now if you should have before you a Hebrew text and some of you possibly have. You’ll note that Joel chapter 2 verse 28 through verse 32 is the third chapter of the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text of the Book of Joel has four chapters and not simply three, but there are no extra verses. It is simply a different division of the verses that we have. The prophet of Pentecost, but he has also been called the prophet of the day of the Lord, and while both of these titles or descriptions of Joel are apt it is probably safe to say that it is an apter description of him to describe him as the prophet of the day of the Lord. For the expression, the day of the Lord of the three chapters in our English text occurs about five times, and I want to read these verses because I think it is helpful for us to see for ourselves the occurrence of this important expression which we will be referring to from time to time in our brief series of studies on the this book.

Notice chapter 1 and verse 15. We read, “Alas for the day!” Now actually this is a reference to the Day of the Lord, but the precise expression is not found until the next clause. “For the day of the Lord is near.” Strictly speaking the expression appears twice in that one verse. Then in chapter 2 and verse 1 we read, “Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; surely it is near.” Verse 11, “The Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His army is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?” And then in

verse 31 of chapter 2 we read, “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” And the final occurrence of the expression, the day of the Lord, is found in chapter 3 and verse 14 in a well known text often cited, “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”

So Joel is the prophet of the day of the Lord. It is one of the great themes of the book, and we do want to speak a little time from time to time discussing the significance of that expression in the Old Testament record. There are three great truths that were committed to Joel, and I guess, we could probably say there were others, but these three are three that I want to mention right now. First is this truth of the day of the Lord. This is the day in which he manifests himself as the Lord.

Now young men who study in theological seminary use the term, Yahweh. We really do not actually know the name of the covenant keeping God. It's probably most likely that his name was Yahweh, but we're not absolutely certain. We know in our English Bibles many of them use the term, Jehovah. We know it was not that, but nevertheless, the day of the Lord, the idea back of the term Lord is the idea of the covenant keeping God; the covenant making and covenant keeping God. It is fairly safe to say that the Yahweh of the Old Testament is our Lord Jesus Christ of the New Testament for it is he with whom Israel had her dealings.

So the day of the Lord is the day of the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ as the sovereign and gracious Lord. It is therefore a day of judgment; judgment for the enemies of the Lord. It is a day of vindication; a day of redemption for his people. The term in the book I think we shall see has a kind of double sense, that is it is a term which has a reference to the local plague of locusts about which Joel writes in the book for it was a time of judgment from God, but it also goes beyond that and has a future sense referring to the time of the Second Advent of Yahweh, our Lord Jesus, and the execution of the final judgment before the inauguration of the kingdom.

Now I want you in your reading of the Book of Joel if you will to ask yourself the question in each of the contexts that you find this expression, is the reference to primarily the local situation, the plague of locust with which Joel and Judah were involved or is it primarily with reference to the future? Joel is the prophet then of the day of the Lord, the day in which the Lord manifests himself as the sovereign and gracious king. That's one of the great truths committed to the Prophet Joel.

The second of the great truths committed to him is the truth of the doctrine of repentance. Now that is important in the Book of Joel, and it is expressed specifically in chapter 2, verse 12 through verse 17. I'll just read a verse or two beginning in chapter 2, verse 12.

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.’ Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.”

The doctrine of repentance; the repentance that the prophet asks of the children of Israel is accompanied by the promise of forgiveness, and I think that we have here in the great references to repentance the passages that would be most like that passage which we often hear people refer to in 2 Chronicles chapter 7 and verse 14. This text is often cited. You needn't look at it. I'll just read it for you. “And My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” I think that Joel is talking about that truth that is expressed in that well known passage.

The third of the truths that Joel especially stresses which was committed to him is the doctrine of the outpoured Spirit referred to at the end of chapter 2 and cited by Peter

in his great sermon on the Day of Pentecost. It is the Old Testament prophecy of the gift of the Spirit.

Now I do not say the gifts of the Spirit for the gifts of the Spirit refer to those sovereign enablements given to all Christians to perform the service that God has for them. But the gift of the Spirit, singularly, the gift of the Spirit is the gift of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy on the Day of Pentecost. Just as the Old Testament prophesied that Jesus Christ would come at a certain time according to the Book of Daniel and would die a redemptive death on the cross at Calvary at a certain time, so the Old Testament said that the Holy Spirit would be given at a specific time. The Old Testament speaks of this typically and in the New Testament we see its fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost. So it is the doctrine of the gift of the outpoured Spirit on the Day of Pentecost to which Joel refers.

Now that coming of the Spirit and that gift of the Spirit is a once and for all gift. The Holy Spirit has been given in that historical sense. Joel is the prophet who prophesies of that coming. Joel's name, I'm still in my introduction in case you wonder where I am. That was point one in the introduction and I have three sub points.

Now the second point of the introduction is this, Joel's name means Jehovah or Yahweh is God. Now it's not a unique name. Over twelve other people in the Old Testament have the name Joel. So it was a very common name. It's a common name now among Christians. Many Christians name their children Joel. It's a pretty name, and it has a significant meaning, Yahweh is God. It was the confession of his father whose name was Pethuel. Pethuel probably means persuaded of the Lord.

So he was a man who had a spiritual experience himself and when his son Joel was born he named him Joel as an expression of his own testimony. It may well have reflected the fact that he wished that his son might be a man of God, even a prophet of God just as many mothers pray that their son might be a preacher. Why they do I don't know, but nevertheless they do. [Laughter]

Now I'm really delighted that some have faith to do that, and Pethuel, evidently a man of God, desired that his son be one used by God and named him in his own testimony Yahweh is God. Joel was a native of Judah. It's not specifically stated but there are things in this prophecy which we shall see later on that confirm that fact. He was a native of Judah and I'm going to suggest with a little bit of trepidation because there's a great deal of evidence on the other side that he was a prophet who prophesied early. That question is unsettled. The most recent Old Testament scholarship believes that Joel prophesied rather late. But the tradition has been, generally speaking, to the effect that he prophesied earlier and his association with the pre-exilic prophets in the Minor Prophets, Hosea and Amos, would tend to confirm the fact that the rabbis at least the earliest students of the word believed that Joel was a prophet who prophesied early.

We turn to chapter 1 and the locusts; a devastation from God to bring Judah to repentance and to the Lord through that repentance. One commentator has said that the Book of Joel is really one great prophecy about locusts and what the plague of locusts teaches us. And that is not far from the truth. But now let's read the first chapter of the Book of Joel. Professor Richard Molten, a somewhat liberal man but nevertheless conservative enough to say some good things about the Bible once said this: “We've done almost everything that is possible with the Hebrew and Greek writings. There's just one thing left to do with the Bible, simply read it.” That's important, and I hope that we never lose, incidentally, the desire and the motivation to read the Bible. Reading the Bible over and over and over again is the greatest spiritual tunic that anyone could ever had.

So will you listen now as I read now? I'll read. You follow along in your text, the first chapter of the Book of Joel.

“The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this happened in your days or in your fathers' days? Tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the

next generation. What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; and what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten. Awake, drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you wine drinkers, On account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth. For a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number; its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness.”

(Incidentally, when he says a nation has invaded my land you might think that he is speaking about a real nation of men, but it was very customary for people who observed the plagues of locusts in the East to describe them like an army and they were just that. They all marched together just like an army. Have you ever noticed that about, well, you’ve never been in a locust plague? But I saw the dregs of one, one time in Nashville, Tennessee. That’s a rather interesting thing about locusts that they all tend, they’re very gregarious. They like to stay together, and they stay together and they march like an army and they follow a set pattern of what they are doing. They are just like a nation marching. Verse 7,)

“And it has made my vine a waste and my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast them away; their branches have become white. Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. (That’s the temple.) The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord. The field is ruined, the land mourns; for the grain is ruined, the new wine dries up, fresh oil fails. Be ashamed, O farmers, Wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley; because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine dries up and the fig tree fails; the pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree, (That reference to the apple tree is a debatable one, and many students of the Hebrew text here feel that apricot is a better rendering of the Hebrew word, but it’s insignificant for the purposes of the exposition

tonight.) all the trees of the field dry up. Indeed, rejoicing dries up from the sons of men. Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God, for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty. Has not food been cut off before our eyes, gladness and joy from the house of our God? The seeds shrivel under their clods; the storehouses are desolate, the barns are torn down, for the grain is dried up. How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander aimlessly because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep suffer. To You, O Lord, I cry; for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field. (Incidentally, in connection with that it was also common for people who had experienced locust plagues to describe the result of the locust in terms of a fire for the destruction that they wrought resembled the destruction that a great conflagration wrought. Finally, the 20th verse,) Even the beasts of the field pant for Thee; for the water brooks are dried up and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.”

The first twelve verses of this first chapter of the Book of Joel are an appeal to the nation to respond to the disaster that has been brought upon them. A question that faces us immediately in the Book of Joel is this, are the locust actual literal locusts the kinds of locusts that we might see and be involved with ourselves? In other words, are the locusts here a reference to an historical plague that really occurred in Joel's day? Or is it possible that the locusts are intended to be understood allegorically? Do they represent, for example, the lusts of the flesh? Or is it possible since there are four locusts referred to and one follows right after the other that Joel might be giving us a figurative description of the times of the Gentiles and the four great world powers that were to rise and fall on

the earthly scene? Is he speaking about the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Grecian Empire, and the Roman Empire, and ultimately, the revived Roman empire of the last days? That interpretation has been given by more than one student of this first chapter. Or is it possible that what we have here is simply an apocalyptic description of locusts that are going to come on the earth during the time of the Great Tribulation?

We do read over in the 9th chapter of the Book of Revelation of a similar kind of thing. There John writes in the 1st verse of the 9th chapter,

“Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.”

Now these are strange animals because we read in the 7th verse, “The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women.” This was the text that many students about fifteen years ago said is the text in the Bible that refers to the Beatles, because it says here in verse 7 that their faces were like the faces of men but they had hair like the hair of women, but that text refers to some superhuman monsters that are going to be part of the plagues of the last days. Does Joel refer to that?

All three of these interpretations have been taken of the plague of locusts described in Joel in chapter 1 and chapter 2, but for your information not for the solution to the problem I am taking these as actual locusts, that is it was a locust plague in the day of the Prophet Joel and you would have recognized these animals as locusts except you would not have recognized the kind of destruction that they managed to consummate

because we don't, it seems to me, have that kind of plague here. When I was in Europe just two or three weeks ago, a couple of weeks ago reading in the Herald Tribune published in Zurich now the English newspaper which so many English speaking people read on the continent, I saw an article in which one of the countries of the East was asking for help and warning others that there was every evidence that there was going to be a locust plague before too long this summer. So it is something that peoples in the East have to worry about, and it is a terrible thing.

These opening verses then are an appeal to the children of Israel and especially to the nation Judah to respond to the devastation that has been wrought by the plague of locusts and return to the Lord. The opening words describe the author of the book. “The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel.” Notice that there is no time reference in this opening verse, and consequently, we do not know the precise time at which Joel prophesied. He does not say in the reign of Josiah or some other king by which to date himself. He simply says, “The word of the Lord that came to Joel.” The very fact that he says that the word of the Lord came to him indicates that he was no mechanical medium. He was not simply a secretary who just took down words, but he himself entered into the experience of the divine revelation. There were things that the Lord gave him, of course, and then there were things that the Lord gave him by way of his own experience with the Lord. Less than fifty percent of this book is said to be from the Lord directly. In other words, the “I” of the book reference to Jehovah is an I that encompasses less than half of the book. But Joel tells us right here at the beginning that the whole of this prophesy is the word of the Lord.

So it does not have to be spoken by the Lord himself as a kind of quotation for the words to be the word of the Lord. That general truth has some reference to the discussions that are taking place today in evangelicalism over the doctrine of inspiration and the doctrine of inerrancy.

So this is the word of the Lord that came to Joel, and he feels the burden of it. What he does first is to give us a general call for attention. “Hear this, O elders.” The elders in Israel had responsibility for the community. In verse 14, they are referred to when he tells them to proclaim a solemn assembly, “Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land.”

So it is the elders who had responsibility and he addresses them first here and asks for attention to what has happened to them. “Has anything like this happened in your days or in your fathers’ days?” So there must have been some kind of national panic over the locust plague, and the description of the four types of locusts. By the way, there are I think nine different words for locusts in the Old Testament, but Joel picks four of them. Our text speaks of them as the gnawing locust, the swarming locust, the creeping locust, and the striping locust. I don’t want to meet any of these. But the first word does come from a word that means something like shearing, so we have the shearer, and the swarmer, the lapper, and the finisher. And the impression you get is that swarm after swarm of these locusts come and what the first one does not eat the second one does, and what the second one leaves the third eats, and what the third leaves if there is anything left the fourth, the finisher, comes and finishes it up.

Now I want to read you something about some of the descriptions of the locust plague so you can sense what it really meant to be the recipients of the devastation or a catastrophe like this. This is a description of one of the locust plagues. “One of the young locusts rapidly attains the size of the common grasshopper and proceeds in one and the same direction. First crawling and then at a later period leaping as they go devouring every green thing that lies in their path. They advance more slowly than a devouring fire, but the ravages they commit are scarcely inferior or less to be dreaded. Fields of standing wheat and barley, vineyards, mulberry orchards, and groves of Olive, fig, and other trees are in a few hours deprived of every gleaming green blade and leaf, the very bark being often destroyed. The ground over which their devastating hordes

have past at once assumes the appearance of sterility and dirt. Well did the Romans call them the burners of the land which is the literal meaning of our word locust? On they move covering the ground so completely as to hide it from sight and in such numbers that it often takes three or four days for the mighty hosts to pass by.”

Now there are some other descriptions. Another one that I will read for you is simply this, “In their march they devour every green thing and with wonderful expedition. The noise made in marching and foraging is like that of a heavy shower in a distant forest. Nothing in their habits is more striking than the pert tenacity in which they all pursue the same line of march, like a disciplined army.” And then in a description of a locust plague in Joppa in the land of Palestine, an observer said, “The gardens outside Joppa are now completely stripped even the bark of the young trees having been devoured and look like a birch tree forest in the winter.”

One might ask why does Joel write about this and why is God interested in transmitting this information to posterity? Well, the answer to it is probably simple. The first thing that Joel would have his readers come to understand is that the God who is responsible for this catastrophe is a God that rules in the world. And the second thing that he wants to bring home to them is the fact that he is a God who not only rules, but he abhors sin. And because he abhors sin, he does execute judgment and a kind of judgment that even pertains to the experiences of life. It is a fair thing for every one of us in the light of the things that happen to us to always ask the question, Lord, has this happened to me because of my sin? Or has this happened to me in order that I may be disciplined or that I might be educated? It's not always, of course, that our troubles and trials come because we have sinned, but we should always be exercised by the things that happen to us, and I think that that is obviously the reason, first of all, that Joel is told of the Lord to tell Judah to tell their sons about it, and let their sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation.

Now having given this general exhortation or this general summons in verse 5 through verse 12 he gives special summons to various parts of the nation. And the thought under girding all of this is that this catastrophe demands special spiritual response to this Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

Now in those days they didn't know of the can opener, and of course, when the locust plague came they lost everything. They could not go into the pantry and take out those things they had saved for just such a time as this. They didn't know anything about the United States Relief Commission, and they didn't know anything about CARE. So these great catastrophes that occurred were very significant things for them, and God would have them through these things to ask themselves some pertinent spiritual questions. The first group of the state of Judah that is addressed is the drunkards in verse 5, 6, and 7.

Now you can see why they're addressed. They've been enjoying themselves, but now that the locusts have come through the vines are gone and the supplies are drying up and it was a devastating thing for them. Anybody who knows anything about people who drink and especially alcoholics know that one of the characteristics of an alcoholic is to prepare for that time when he cannot get his hand on a drink, and so he has various bottles stashed throughout the house that he thinks nobody else knows anything about. But of course, he knows about them and usually, others know about them too. Ah! There's Fred's bottles over there in the corner. He thought he was hiding them from me.

But now when the word goes out through the nation that the vines are gone and the supplies are gone, well you can see that since it is a catastrophe that has occurred from heaven it is a direct word from God to the sinners who sin by means of the bottle. “Awake, drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth.” Then having spoken to the drunkards whose vines “looked like a birch tree forest in the winter” to use the expression given just in the

description that I have just read, the prophet speaks to the city of Jerusalem in verse 8, 9, and 10.

Now you do not see in verses 8, 9, and 10 any reference to city and you do not see any reference to Jerusalem, but I am surmising that this is the reference for these verses because the imperative in verse 8, “Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth.” The imperatives here that open this section are feminine in gender, and it was common for Jerusalem or Zion to be likened to a virgin, likened to a woman. And it is probable that this is a special message, verses 8, 9, and 10, to the city itself. “Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.” What an interesting expression that is! We have in the study of marriage in ancient times come to realize that a marriage was a marriage arranged by parents and then at the betrothal when the wife-to-be and the husband-to-be met and exchanged gifts, and though they didn’t begin to live together, it was there that they really became husband and wife. Then a year or so later, usually about a year later, there would be a marriage feast and the bridegroom would take his bride home. But at the betrothal the marriage was really consummated, and so he says, “Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.” One to whom she has been wed but with whom she has not yet come to live. It is a very sad thing.

And finally in verses 11 and 12, he speaks to the farmers. “Be ashamed, O farmers, Wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley; because the harvest of the field is destroyed.”

Well, having given an appeal to turn to the Lord he addresses a special appeal to the priests in verse 13 through verse 18. “Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God.” He’s hopeful that that catastrophe would lead them to cry unto the Lord for forgiveness in repentance in order that God might bless them.

You know, we in the United States of America have great reason as a nation to cry to the Lord as a nation. The truths of the Old Testament that have to do with repentance

and return to the Lord after sin are truths that have to do with a nation by application such as our nation. They also have to do with the church of Jesus Christ. And when the church has strayed from God, it is always proper for us to call upon the professing church of Jesus Christ to give attention to the need of repentance and restoration to the Lord who has made it possible for us to know Jesus Christ as our Savior.

But in our personal life the same principle pertains too. Because it's oh so easy, is it not, to stray from the truths of the Lord, to stray from a vital relationship with him, to abandon the time of prayer, to not read the word of God, to have no real motivation to serve the Lord in seriousness, no real desire to be a part of a local testimony and have part in the ministry of the word of God. It's so easy to become so interested in the things that please us, our own pleasure, our own material wellbeing, that we forget the most important thing. Wasn't it a striking speech that Mr. Solzenhitzen gave to the graduating class in Harvard amid some of the sneers that came from that senior class? It was an amazing speech in which he spoke of the decline of the west, it's loss of courage, and how if he had to pick a place to go and live, he would not find the west attractive because through the troubles that the Russians have had under the regime there, they've learned some of the deeper things of the spirit that we no nothing about over here because we are so committed to human autonomy. These are his words, “So committed to a humanistic world view in which man is the ultimate measure of everything and materialism is the norm by which we measure success in this world.”

These words that Joel speaks are words that have a very direct application to each one of us personally, and to Believers Chapel as a local testimony, and to the entire church of Jesus Christ, and of course, ultimately, to the Unites States of America which originally was established on the assumption that there was a God in heaven, the God that we are acquainted with through the scriptures.

Well, the appeal to the priests is given in verse 13 and verse 14, he says, “Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come,

spend the night in sackcloth.” Not a day of prayer but a night of prayer. And furthermore, he says come, “consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly;” that is, call a special session. Israel had a whole series of the feasts of Jehovah, but they are to be set aside and there is to be a special one because of their present sin. And incidentally, in verse 14 the word for “solemn assembly” is a word that really means literally a stoppage. So he is saying just stop everything. Stop your work, and call a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Spend the whole night in prayer. Gather the whole of the people together through the elders and bring the question of the spiritual relationship to the nation into the presence of the Lord in the temple. It’s a tremendous appeal to get to the root of the problem, and the cause of the appeal follows. “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.”

Now I do not think that when Joel said, “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near,” that he meant that we were to expect the day of the Lord in the immediate future. This near is like the near of the New Testament. It means the day of the Lord is imminent, and this day of the Lord is the day of final judgment and the thoughts of this passage go on to the end of time or the end of this present time I should say when we look forward to the coming of this great Yahweh in judgment at his Second Advent. “It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.” I wish I had time to talk about the Hebrew expression there. It’s a play on words. It’s something like as a mighty ruin from the Almighty One.

“Has not food been cut off before our eyes, gladness and joy from the house of our God? The seeds shrivel under their clods; the storehouses are desolate, the barns are torn down, for the grain is dried up. How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander aimlessly because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep suffer.”

And then the prophet answers for himself. Oh the power of an example and the prophet is the example. Notice what he says. He has called upon them to call a fast and have the people cried out to the Lord, and so Joel himself speaks and he says, “To Thee, O Lord, I cry.” This is the kind of response, the kind of response to spiritual failure that an individual should have, that a church should have, that a nation should have. “To Thee, O Lord, I cry; for the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.”

And finally, in the 20th verse he concludes with, “Even the beasts of the field pant for Thee.” That’s the same word, incidentally, that was used in the 42nd Psalm of the panting of the soul after God. Isn’t it an amazing thing that sometimes according to Scripture the animals understand more than people? That’s not unusual. People are dumber than animals.

There’s an old story. I’ve never forgotten it. It was told by a man named W. T. P. Wolston. It was a man who had a family that were Christians and they had been after him for a long time to come to the Lord, but he was not interested. On Sunday morning when the time came for everybody to go to hear the ministry of the word he just wandered around the house or would wander around in the neighborhood, and one day Mr. Wolston said that he wandered out of the house and was walking down a path and there was a field and there was some cattle in the field. And he was just reflecting kind of unhappy because everybody was gone and he was by himself, and he went over and he leaned up against the fence, and I think it was his own field. And one of the cows came up and was there and just nudged his hand and he remembered a text of Scripture, “The ox knows its owner and the ass its master’s crib, but Israel does not know my people do not understand.” He said, “Why this animal knows its owner, but I don’t know the Lord.” And as a result of that experience he was converted. A man converted by a cow.
[Laughter] Imagine!

Notice, I close with this, “Even the beasts of the field pant for Thee for the water brooks are dried up and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.” Yes, we

can be dumber than animals when our relationship to the Lord is not preeminent in our lives.

Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the word of God, and we thank Thee for this passage from the Prophet Joel which reminds us again of how easy it is to turn from Thee. Oh, God, by the grace of the Holy Spirit enable us to truly cry out unto Thee for forgiveness where forgiveness is necessary, for repentance where repentance is needed that we might truly enjoy the fellowship with Thee that brings true spiritual usefulness and satisfaction lest in the hour that follows. For Jesus' sake. Amen.